

Final Project Report

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Introduction

Oxides are catalytically important materials. They can be used as catalysts or as catalyst supports. Since oxides can possess basic, acidic, and redox properties, they can catalyze a wide variety of reactions, including some well known examples such as aldol condensation (base catalyzed), alkane cracking (acid catalyzed), and selective oxidation (redox catalyzed). Our research conducted in this project focused mostly on the redox properties of the metal cations in the oxides. Two industrially important reactions were investigated. One was the selective oxidative dehydrogenation of light alkanes, and the other was the hydrocarbon reduction of NO_x. Our emphasis was to elucidate the relationship between the catalytic and the chemical properties of oxides used in these reactions. A summary of progress are presented below.

1. Oxidative Dehydrogenation Of Alkanes Over Vanadium Oxides-Based Catalysts

There has been a strong interest to effect oxidative dehydrogenation of light alkanes such as ethane, propane and butane because of their lower cost relative to the alkene counterparts. Ideally, for oxidative dehydrogenation of alkanes, the formation of alkenes is the only reaction (Eq. 1). In practice, however, nonselective oxidation to carbon oxides (Eq. 2) and other products also occurs.



The emphasis of our work was to increase the understanding of the nature of the active sites and factors that determine selectivity for dehydrogenation.

We were first to report that mixed oxides of vanadium and magnesium (V-Mg-O) show high selectivity for oxidative dehydrogenation of alkane [1,2]. By impregnating a solution of ammonium metavanadate onto MgO or Mg(OH)₂ followed by calcination, mixtures of different magnesium vanadates were formed. The formation of various vanadates could be followed using IR spectroscopy and x-ray diffraction. These vanadates include: magnesium orthovanadate (Mg₃(VO₄)₂), magnesium pyrovanadate (Mg₂V₂O₇), and magnesium metavanadate (MgV₂O₆). These vanadates have different structures. Especially of interest is the manner with which the VO₄ tetrahedra are linked to other units in the structure. For example, (Mg₃(VO₄)₂) has isolated VO₄ tetrahedra, α-Mg₂V₂O₇ is made up of corner-sharing VO₄ tetrahedra that form V₂O₇ units, and MgV₂O₆ is made up of metavanadate chains of edge-sharing VO₅ units.

V-Mg-O catalysts of a range of compositions, from low V content to one equivalent to the formation of Mg pyrovanadate (69 wt.% V₂O₅) were studied [1,2,3,4,5,6] for the oxidative dehydrogenation of ethane, propane, butane, 2-methylpropane, and cyclohexane. Other vanadium oxide-based catalysts, including rare earth and base metal vanadates [7,8], SiO₂- [9] and Al₂O₃-supported [10] and unsupported V-P-O [11], as well as Cs-modified supported V₂O₅ [12], and K- modified V-Mg-O [13] were studied. These catalysts were investigated to examine the effect of the atomic structure of the VO₄ units, the reducibility of the cation in the vanadate, and the effect of dispersion and support on the selectivity of the reaction. With few exceptions, the presence of V increases the activity of the catalyst significantly, suggesting that V is chemically involved in the active sites. In fact, these catalysts produced alkene products in pulse

experiments without oxygen present and the product selectivity remained similar to the steady state experiments, implying that proximate source of oxygen is the solid lattice.

Taking the results together, it was found that the selectivity for dehydrogenation depends on the reducibility of the second cation: a less reducible cation results in a more selective catalyst, as shown in Table 1. For supported vanadia, the selectivity depends on the loading. Generally, lower loading catalysts are more selective, which are also less easily reducible. Raman spectroscopic investigations suggest that the VO_x structure of highly dispersed V_2O_5 on a support resembles those of orthovanadates. Interestingly, the catalytic behavior also depends on the alkane as shown in Table 2. The selectivity depends on the alkane conversion, being lower at higher conversions (Fig. 1). This is expected for a sequential reaction scheme in which the desired product is an intermediate product. From the data such as that shown in Fig. 1, it can be estimated that on a Mg orthovanadate-MgO catalyst, the rate constant for the conversion of propene to carbon oxides is about 4 times greater than the rate constant for the conversion of propane to propene at 500°C [3].

Table 1: A comparison of the selectivity for alkenes over Mg orthovanadate and Mg pyrovanadate.

Alkane	Mg orthovanadate				Mg pyrovanadate			
	Temp (C)	Alkane. conv. %	Select. %	AOS ^d	Temp (C)	Alkane. conv. %	Select. %	AOS ^d
$\text{C}_2\text{H}_6^{\text{a}}$	540	5.2	24	2.1	540	3.2	30	2.1
$\text{C}_3\text{H}_8^{\text{c}}$	541	6.7	64	2.1	505	7.9	61	2.1
$\text{C}_4\text{H}_{10}^{\text{c}}$	540	8.5	65.9 ^b	2.5	500	6.8	31.8 ^b	3.9
i- $\text{C}_4\text{H}_{10}^{\text{a}}$	500	8	64	2.1	502	6.8	25	4.1

a: The data for Mg orthovanadate were obtained with 40VMgO, which contained Mg orthovanadate and MgO.

b: Sum of selectivity to butenes and butadiene.

c: Data using samples of relatively pure phases.

d: Average oxygen stoichiometry.

Table 2: Correlation between reduction potential of the cation in orthovanadate and selectivity for oxidative dehydrogenation of butane.

Cation	Reduction potential, V	Butane conv. %	Dehydrog. select. %
Mg	-2.40	5.2	62
Nd	-2.30	8.5	62
Sm	-2.30	7.9	59
Zn	-0.76	6.6	41
Cr	-0.42	5.5	17
Eu	-0.35	5.5	41
Ni	-0.26	7.3	18
Cu	+0.32	6.9	4
Fe	+0.77	6.5	17

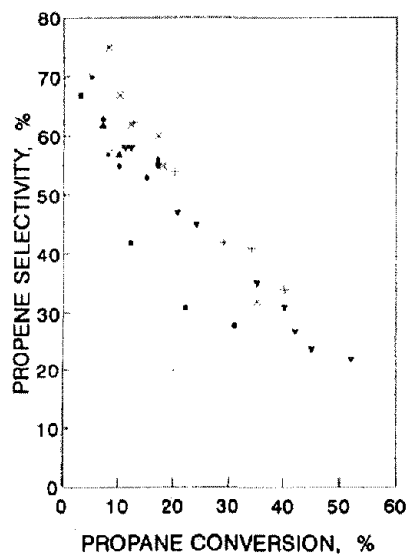
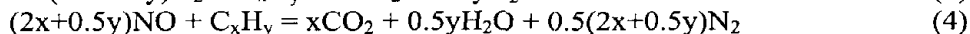


Fig. 1: Illustrative catalytic behavior of V-Mg-O catalysts in the oxidative dehydrogenation of propane.

The mechanism of the reaction was proposed to involve first the abstraction of a H atom from an alkane molecule. This step is likely the rate limiting step, since the overall rate of the alkane oxidation reaction depends on the strength of the C-H bond [4,6]. We have also proposed a selectivity-determining step involving the reaction of an adsorbed alkyl [11]. The number of surface VO_x units that presumably form the surface active site (that is, that can effectively interact with the adsorbed alkyl and participate in the reaction of one adsorbed molecule) determine the average oxygen stoichiometry. The effective size of such an unit is determined by both the size of the adsorbed hydrocarbon species as well as the rate of reoxidation of the vanadium active center either by lattice diffusion or with oxygen from the gas phase. Thus, for a particular hydrocarbon, catalysts of different compositions but the same effective size of the surface active site (i.e. same average oxygen stoichiometry) would exhibit the same selectivity. Finally, we postulate that the effective size depends on the linkage of VO_4 units in a vanadate structure.

2. Alumina-Supported Catalysts for NO Reduction in an Oxidizing Atmosphere

The concern over air quality has resulted in increasingly tightened standards on the permissible emission levels of atmospheric pollutants. In recent years, new standards for light and heavy duty diesel engine exhausts have been promulgated. Meeting these new standards has posted significant challenges for the engine and catalyst manufacturers. The lean-burn operation of these engines results in an exhaust that contains a much higher concentration of oxygen and lower concentration of reductants (hydrocarbon and CO) than in the exhaust of a stoichiometric gasoline engine. Consequently, the highly-developed three-way catalysts used for gasoline engine exhaust are not effective in removing NO_x from the diesel exhaust; the reductant are consumed by combustion mostly (Eq. 3) instead of by reaction with NO_x to form N_2 (Eq. 4). New catalysts are needed that can selectively catalyze the reaction between NO and a reductant, which is preferably a hydrocarbon or its derivative, without catalyzing its combustion. This type of reactions is generally known as lean NO_x catalysis.



The most heavily investigated catalysts for the lean-burn engines are based on zeolites, particularly the MFI type. Cu-ZSM-5 was the first reported and most studied catalyst that demonstrates a high selectivity for NO_x reduction with small hydrocarbons [14,15], and many other ion-exchanged MFI catalysts have since been studied. However, it was soon discovered that these catalysts suffer from structural degradation after prolonged exposure to the reaction mixture, making it doubtful that they can meet the durability requirement for a commercial product.

We were one of the first few who demonstrated conclusively that alumina-supported catalysts can be quite effective for this reaction. The early results of Iwamoto suggested that alumina-supported catalysts are much inferior to the MFI-supported ones [16]. However, we and other later showed that the preparation, pretreatment, and loading of the catalyst can have significant effects on the effectiveness of alumina-based catalysts in NO_x reduction. While it is

still generally true that MFI-supported catalysts of the same metal is more active at lower temperatures than an alumina-supported ones, the latter is equally selective for the reaction at somewhat higher temperatures.

γ -Alumina as a lean NO_x reduction catalyst

As a catalyst, γ -alumina (whence simply referred to as alumina) has a very low activity at temperatures below around 400°C for the reduction of NO using hydrocarbons in a typical synthetic lean exhaust gas mixture (e.g., 5-10% O₂, 2-10% H₂O, 0.1% NO, and 0.1% propene). Figure 2 shows some typical results [17]. Curves A and B show the N₂ yield (%NO in the feed converted to N₂) as a function of temperature for two different experiments. In the experiment with a higher space velocity and oxygen and water partial pressures (curve A), the NO yield increased steadily with increasing temperature, reaching a maximum at around 600°C. The hydrocarbon conversion paralleled this trend, being low below 450°C, but rose rapidly above 500°C, reaching close to 100% above 550°C. For the experiment with a slower space velocity, the N₂ yield increased steadily with increasing temperature below about 500°C. At that temperature, sustained oscillations in both the N₂ yield and hydrocarbon conversion were observed. The oscillation could be observed within a temperature window of about 10°C. Within this window, the period and the oscillation amplitude pattern are quite sensitively dependent on the temperature [18]. Such oscillation was also observed by others [19].

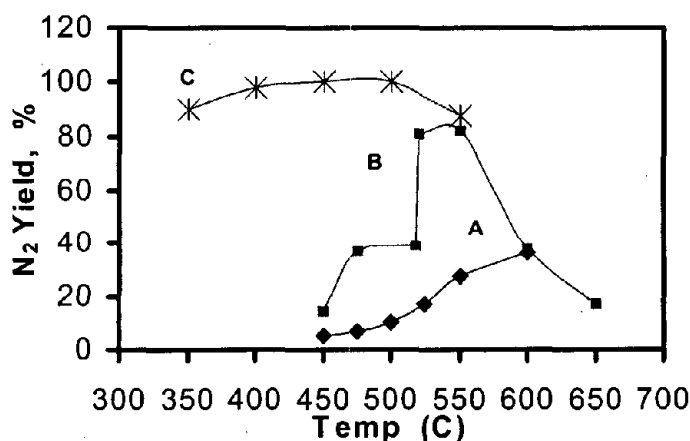


Figure 2. N₂ yield in the reduction of NO or NO₂ over γ -Al₂O₃. Curve A (♦): 0.2 g catalyst, 200 mL/min of 0.1% NO, 0.1% propene, 15% O₂, 10% H₂O, balance He; curve B (■): 0.25 g catalyst, 100 mL/min of 0.1% NO, 0.1% propene, 6% O₂, balance He; curve C (*): 0.25 g catalyst, 100 mL/min of 0.1% NO₂, 0.1% propene, 5% O₂, balance He.

Although alumina alone can utilize the hydrocarbon reductant with a high efficiency, the temperature required for a substantial activity is too high for practical treatment of diesel engine exhausts. Alumina is much more active in the reduction of NO_2 with hydrocarbon than in the reduction of NO , as shown by curve C in Fig. 1. Significant NO_2 conversion to N_2 was observed above 300°C . NO_2 is a much more reactive oxidant than NO , and it has been shown that exposure of alumina to NO_2 results in the formation of adsorbed NO_y species readily that can react with hydrocarbon [20]. Thus, it may be concluded that activation of hydrocarbon is a slow step on alumina, and higher activities can be obtained by using more reactive reductants. Indeed, under otherwise identical conditions, the reaction temperature necessary for substantial NO_x reduction increases as: methanol \approx ethanol $<$ 2-propanol $<$ propene $<$ propane [21]. That is, the more "activated" or oxidized is the hydrocarbon, the easier is its reaction with NO_x . This is a consequence of the poor oxidation activity of alumina, not only for hydrocarbons, but also for the oxidation of NO to NO_2 [22,23].

γ -Alumina-Supported Catalysts

The activity of an alumina catalyst can be increased substantially by adding another component. Various metals and oxides have been reported to be effective, including Au [24,25], Ag [17,26], CoO_x [27,28], SnO_2 [29,30], and Pt [31,32]. Alumina-supported Pt has the highest activity at low temperatures, but N_2O is a significant product, especially at low temperatures high hydrocarbon conversion. For all of these catalysts, the catalytic performance has an apparent dependence on the loading of the supported phase. For example, the selectivity for hydrocarbon reduction of NO versus hydrocarbon combustion is much higher for a low-loading Ag/ Al_2O_3 than a high loading one [17,26]. Similarly, a low-loading $\text{CoO}_x/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ catalyst is much more effective than a high loading sample (Fig. 3) [28].

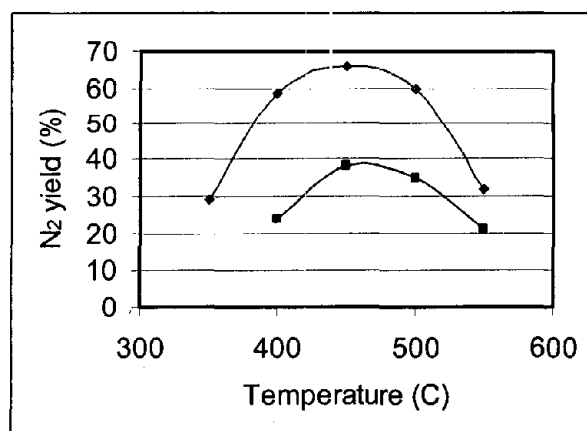


Figure 3: Reduction of NO over $\text{CoO}_x/\gamma\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$. (♦) 0.5 g 2 wt.% Co, pretreated at 550°C , 100 mL/min of 0.1% NO , 0.1% propene, 5% O_2 , 1.7% H_2O , balance He; (■): 0.5 g 5 wt.% Co, pretreated at 550°C , same feed.

The reasons for the dependence on loading differ for different materials. For Ag/Al₂O₃, the smaller Ag particles in low-loading samples are more difficult to be reduced to metallic Ag than large Ag particles. The ionic Ag is believed to be much more effective for NO_x reduction, whereas metallic Ag particles are more active for combustion, and produces a substantial amount of N₂O. For CoO_x/Al₂O₃, highly dispersed CoO_x that interacts strongly with Al₂O₃ is much less active for hydrocarbon combustion than Co₃O₄ that exists in high-loading samples. In the case of Pt/Al₂O₃, the activity of Pt is a strong function of dispersion. The activities for NO reduction (to N₂ and N₂O) and the corresponding hydrocarbon oxidation, and oxidation of NO to NO₂ all decrease with increasing Pt dispersion [33]. Interestingly, Pt dispersion has much less effect on the ratio of N₂ to N₂O products [32,33].

Contrary to these examples, the effect of dispersion of SnO₂ in SnO₂/Al₂O₃ shows a somewhat different behavior. At low loadings, increasing the SnO₂ content increases the NO reduction activity, which is expected if SnO₂ is the active phase. However, a maximum NO reduction activity is attained at a loading of 5-10 wt.% Sn. Further increase in loading decreases the activity [29] (Fig. 4). X-ray diffraction of these samples shows that SnO₂ first exists in an X-ray amorphous form at low loadings, and crystalline SnO₂ are formed at higher loadings. The presence of at least these two forms of SnO₂ is consistent with the temperature programmed reduction results (Fig. 5), which show only a broad reduction peak for low-loading samples and the appearance of a much sharper, high-temperature peak for high loading samples. The features can be assigned to amorphous and crystalline SnO₂, respectively. Since the surface area of crystalline SnO₂ is small, the observed catalytic behavior would be mostly due to amorphous SnO₂, the amount of which would reach a maximum after a certain loading.

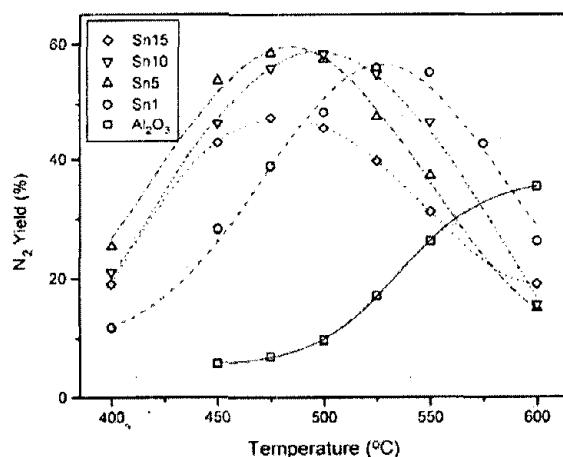


Figure 4: Reduction of NO over SnO₂/γ-Al₂O₃ of different Sn loadings, ranging from 0 to 15 wt.% Sn. 0.1%NO, 0.1% propene, 15% O₂, 10% H₂O, balance He, space velocity 30,000 h⁻¹.

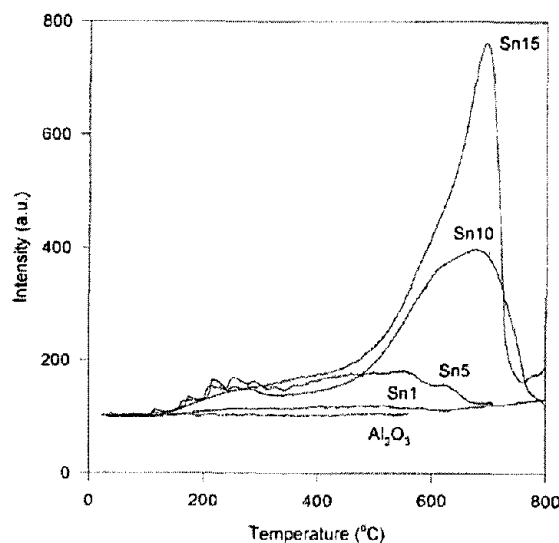


Figure 5: H_2 -Temperature programmed reduction of SnO_2/Al_2O_3 catalysts samples in Fig. 4.

However, the behavior of these catalysts seems to be more complicated. If amorphous SnO_2 is the active phase that contributes to most of the observed activity, then why do the higher loading samples not only have lower activity for NO reduction, but also have lower selectivity for this reaction compared with hydrocarbon combustion (as indicated by lower maximum N_2 yield)? The attempt to answer this question led to the observations described below.

Bifunctional SnO_2/Al_2O_3

If SnO_2 is the only active phase, then the conversion and product distributions should be the same as long as there is the same amount of amorphous SnO_2 in a reactor (under otherwise identical reaction conditions). That is, one would expect that the observations from an experiment using 0.2 g of a sample containing 1 wt.% Sn would be the same as those using 0.04 g of another sample containing 5 wt.% Sn, since the SnO_2 in both samples are mostly in the amorphous form (Fig. 5), and the 5 wt.% sample is approximately five times more active than the 1 wt.% sample (Fig. 4). However, this is not the case, as shown in Fig. 6 [34]. Under the conditions used, 0.04 g of the 5 wt.% sample showed very low NO reduction activity compared with 0.2 g 1 wt.% sample, although their hydrocarbon conversion activities were quite similar. One major difference between these two experiments is the amount of Al_2O_3 in the reactor. When 0.16 g of Al_2O_3 was added to 0.04 g of the 5 wt.% sample to make a physical mixture of the same composition as the 1 wt.% sample, a substantial increase in NO reduction activity was observed (Fig. 6, curve C).

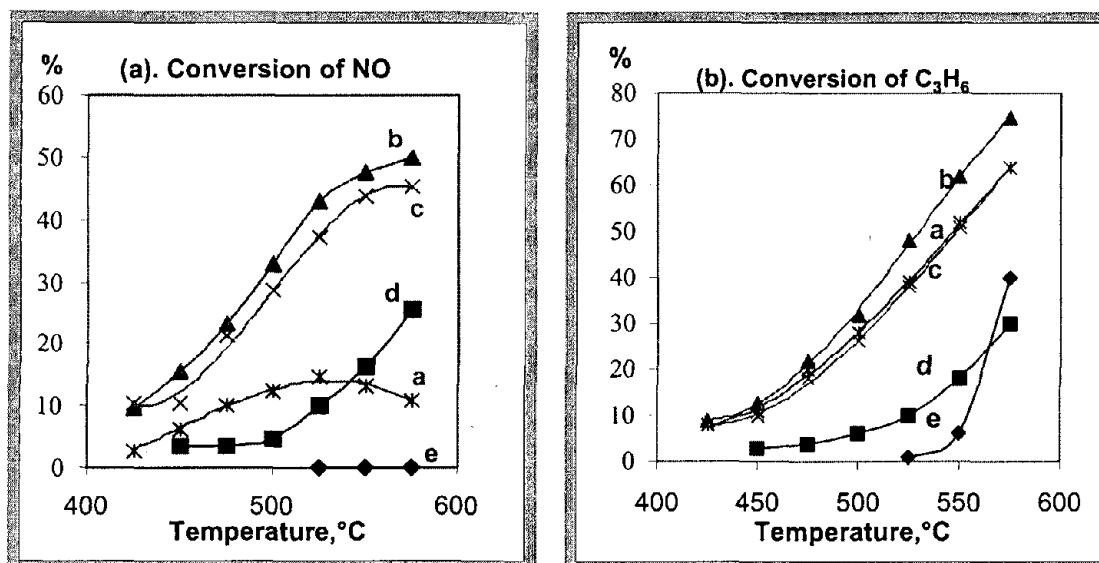


Figure 6: Conversion of (a) NO and (b) propene. Curve a: 0.04 g $\text{SnO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ containing 5 wt.% Sn; curve b: 0.2 g $\text{SnO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ containing 1 wt.% Sn; curve c: physical mixture of 0.04 g 5wt.% Sn sample with 0.16 g Al_2O_3 ; Curve d: 0.16 g Al_2O_3 ; curve e: blank reactor. 15% O_2 , 10% H_2O , 0.1% NO, 0.11% propene, balance He.

The results of Fig. 6 indicate that $\text{SnO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ is a bifunctional catalyst; both SnO_2 and Al_2O_3 are necessary for effective NO reduction. In order to further test this, the catalytic activity of a $\text{SnO}_2/\text{SiO}_2$ containing 5 wt.% Sn was tested. The results, as illustrated in Table 3, show that in the absence of Al_2O_3 , SnO_2 catalyzes the oxidation of propene primarily to acrolein, with the formation of some acetaldehyde also. However, little NO reduction takes place. Furthermore, the catalyst is not active for NO oxidation to NO_2 , as the NO_2 concentration at the reactor exit was the same as the background level. These results imply that on $\text{SnO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$, the function of SnO_2 is to oxidize propene to acrolein. The acrolein formed is transported in the gas phase to alumina, where reduction of NO occurs.

Table 3: Product concentrations in reactor exit. Reaction condition: 15% O_2 , 10% H_2O , 0.1% NO, 0.11% propene, balance He, 475°C.

Sample	Product concentration, ppm				
	N_2	CO_x	acetaldehyde	acrolein	NO_2
5 wt.% Sn/ SiO_2 (0.1 g)	0	318	37	109	41
Al_2O_3 (0.1 g)	10	68	0	0	41
5%Sn/ SiO_2 + Al_2O_3	80	829	20	0	Not determined
Blank	0	0	0	0	40

This assignment of functions to the two components in $\text{SnO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ is substantiated by the results of a two-bed experiment shown in Fig. 7 [34]. In this experiment, a bed of $\text{SnO}_2/\text{SiO}_2$ and a bed of Al_2O_3 were placed in two separate reactors, as schematically shown in the figure. The flow of the feed stream could be configured to enter either reactor first. When the feed configuration was such that the $\text{SnO}_2/\text{SiO}_2$ bed was upstream of the Al_2O_3 bed, substantial NO reduction occurred. However, when the direction of the gas flow was reversed, such that the Al_2O_3 bed was upstream of the $\text{SnO}_2/\text{SiO}_2$ bed, much less NO reduction took place, although the hydrocarbon conversion remained about the same. Thus, hydrocarbon conversion on SnO_2 precedes NO reduction on Al_2O_3 .

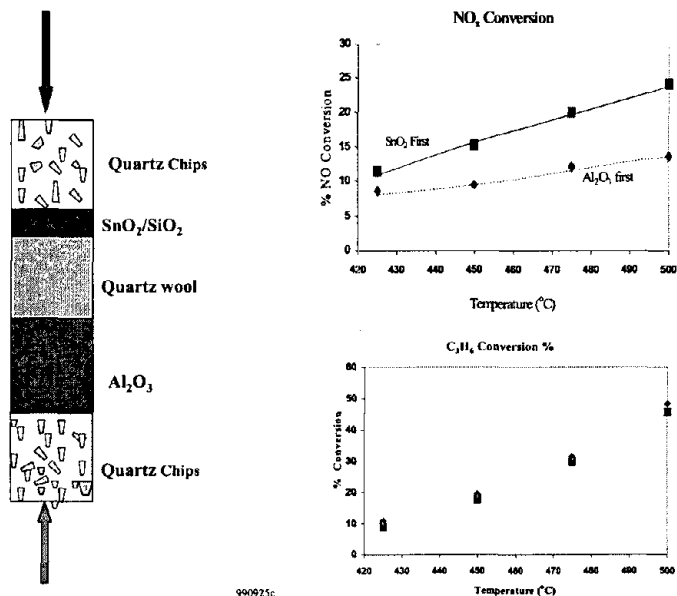
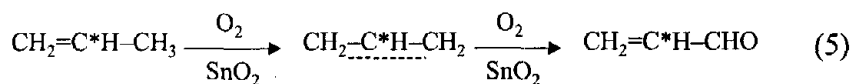


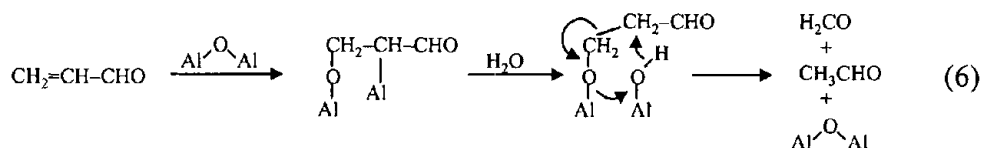
Figure 7: NO and C_3H_6 conversion for experiments using separated beds of $\text{SnO}_2/\text{SiO}_2$ and Al_2O_3 . Experimental conditions same as Fig. 6.



The propene oxidation function of SnO_2 was investigated separately. It was found that the oxidation reaction makes use of oxygen as the oxidant, since whether NO is present in the feed has little effect. If the propene molecule is labeled at the center carbon with ^{13}C , 2- ^{13}C -labelled acrolein was formed exclusively. Thus, the oxidation reaction proceeds via a symmetric π -allyl intermediate commonly observed in selective oxidation of propene (Eq. 5)

The subsequent steps of the reaction take place on alumina. When the reaction of acrolein was studied over alumina, it was found that acrolein reacts rapidly to form acetaldehyde

and formaldehyde. Interestingly, no NO reduction to N₂ occurred in this step. The presence of water is important for this step, as little acetaldehyde was detected without water in the feed stream. In addition, the N₂ yield dropped to about 60% of the yield with water. The formation of acetaldehyde from acrolein is by cleavage of the C=C bond, since 2-¹³C-labeled acrolein produces mostly ¹³CH₃CHO. Thus, this step is the reverse of an aldol condensation reaction (Eq. 6). We postulate that a bridging Al-O-Al is the catalytic site.



The reaction of acetaldehyde on alumina is rather slow, of the order of ten times slower than acrolein, and the products are mostly CO (about 80%) and CO₂. Some small amounts of HCN are also formed. At the same time, NO is reduced to N₂.

The bifunctional nature of SnO₂/Al₂O₃ explains the dependence of the NO reduction efficiency on the SnO₂ loading. At very low SnO₂ loadings, the oxidation of propene to acrolein is limiting the overall reaction rate, and the catalytic activity increases with increasing SnO₂ loading. When the SnO₂ loading is high, the overall reaction rate is limited by the rate of reaction of acetaldehyde on Al₂O₃. Then, the reaction rate decreases with increasing SnO₂ loading, since the surface area of exposed Al₂O₃ decreases.

Other bifunctional catalysts

Ag/Al₂O₃ is also a bifunctional catalyst. As mentioned earlier, the NO reduction efficiency of this catalyst depends on the Ag loading, and samples of low loadings are more effective than high loadings. Table 4 shows some typical data for a 6 wt.% Ag/Al₂O₃ sample [17]. Even at 100% propene conversion, the reduction of NO to N₂ was only 15%. There was also a substantial amount of N₂O formed. The yield of N₂ was substantially increased by using a physical mixture of 6 wt.% Ag/Al₂O₃ and Al₂O₃, higher than the sum of the yields from the individual components. The enhancement in reactivity was not observed when the Al₂O₃ was replaced with SiO₂ in the physical mixture. Interestingly, for this system, the synergistic effect between components was absent when the 6 wt.% Ag/Al₂O₃ and Al₂O₃ catalysts were separated physically by quartz wool. This suggests that the reaction intermediate, which is formed on Ag and transported to Al₂O₃ for further reaction to reduce NO, is quite reactive. That this synergistic effect is not due to silver migration from the 6 wt.% Ag/Al₂O₃ catalyst to Al₂O₃ was shown by recovery of the original catalytic properties when the physical mixture was separated into its individual components after reaction by sieving.

Table 4: NO Reduction over Ag/Al₂O₃. Reaction conditions: 0.1% NO, 0.1% propene, 6% O₂, balance He, 673 K.

Catalyst	NO conv. to N ₂ (%)	C ₃ H ₆ conv. %
0.25 g 6 wt.% Ag/Al ₂ O ₃	16	100
0.022 g 6 wt.% Ag/Al ₂ O ₃	7	72
0.25 g Al ₂ O ₃	11	8
0.022 g 6 % Ag/Al ₂ O ₃ + 0.23 g Al ₂ O ₃	42	77
0.022 g 6 % Ag/Al ₂ O ₃ + 0.23 g SiO ₂	7	68

The bifunctional nature of supported alumina catalysts has also been observed on other catalysts. Pt/SiO₂ is inactive for the selective reduction of NO by C₃H₈, whereas Pt/Al₂O₃ is a relatively good catalyst. Inaba, et al. observed that the total NO_x conversions over a physical mixture of 80-100 mesh Pt/SiO₂ and Al₂O₃ approach that of Pt/Al₂O₃ [35]. Although Pt catalyzes NO oxidation effectively, at temperatures where significant synergistic effects are present (300 and 350 °C), the role of NO₂ should be minimal since, at these temperatures, the formation of N₂ from NO₂ reduction over Al₂O₃ is negligible. Thus, the synergistic effect is due to the formation of some reactive intermediates on Pt, other than NO₂, which can effectively reduce NO on Al₂O₃.

Publications resulted from this work

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2. "Selective Oxidative Dehydrogenation of Propane over V-Mg-O Catalysts," M.A. Chaar, D. Patel, and H.H. Kung, *J. Catal.*, **109**, 463 (1988).
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